

(3) ... by suffering for it

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[0 : 00] We're going to look this morning at Paul's letter to Timothy, the second letter. So if you would look with me please at page 1197. I will read from chapter 2, verses 1 to 13.

You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses in trust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him.

An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops. Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.

Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal.

[1 : 14] But the word of God is not bound. Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

The saying is trustworthy, for if we have died with him, we also live with him. If we endure, we will also reign with him.

If we deny him, he also will deny us. If we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself.

Right, well, good morning everyone. And thank you very much, Nick, for leading us and for HJ for reading. We're going to be looking at the passage that was read, so it would be helpful if you keep your Bibles open there.

Over these weeks of the summer holiday period, we're looking through Paul's second letter to Timothy to see what we can learn. And if you were here for the last two weeks, you would have heard Nat Charles taking us through chapter one.

[2 : 25] And this morning we'll now see what Paul has to say to Timothy and to us in chapter two, in the first half. Those of you probably in business, but I think all of us have come across various weird phrases that generally have originated in the US and have made their way over to here.

I'm thinking of things like pushing the envelope, touching base, taking a rain trick, a water cooler moment.

Some of you might use these. Some of you probably don't know what they mean. Some of you don't know what they mean and still use them. But there's another phrase which I think I'm sure you've heard, and that is being taken out of one's comfort zone.

And really that is a phrase I think we can all very easily relate to. What's our comfort zone? Well, it's a place where we feel safe, secure, we know what's happening, we know what's around the corner. And we like our comfort zone, if we're honest, whether it's in the home, or a job we're doing, a familiar job, maybe if we're at school, it's being in our class, all our friends around us.

[3 : 46] But, it's necessary often for us to grow to be taken out of our comfort zone.

And as parents, we know this. The time you take the stabilizers off the child's bike, they don't like it. They're out of their comfort zone.

Or maybe having to walk to school for the first time on their own. Or for us, starting a new job. That job we wanted, but then suddenly on that first day, we think, are we up to it?

Can we handle it? I'm out of my comfort zone. And as Christians, I think it would be fair to say, we quite like being in our comfort zone.

Nice, safe church environment. Maybe a comfortable existence. In the church, we've got the job that we know, we can do, we're safe with.

[4 : 50] Perhaps, some of us are a bit reticent about becoming a church member, because we're not sure about wanting to do that. Might be going out of our comfort zone. There could be a whole range of reasons.

And, Timothy, in many ways, was facing this challenge. He was being taken out of his comfort zone.

And the person who is going to help him with this is Paul, the Apostle Paul. Now, the Apostle Paul certainly isn't in a comfort zone.

Paul is in a war zone. He's suffering for being a preacher of the gospel. He's in a Roman prison, and he's chained. We saw that in verse 9, the passage we read.

As we go on through this letter, we'll see that he believes his time on this earth is about to end. He is facing death.

[5 : 56] He says he's been poured out as a drink offering, and that the time of his departure is at hand. He spent a lifetime building up churches around the Middle East and beyond.

And yet, he's experiencing setbacks. We saw that last week, that people in Asia have turned away. False teachers are coming along, undermining his message.

He's in a war zone. And in that war zone, he is looking for those he can trust, for support. And one of those is his old friend, Timothy.

Paul and Timothy, if you know Acts, have gone through a lot together. Timothy, as we saw from chapter 1, he's a true believer, and he comes from a family of believers, particularly his mother and grandmother.

Timothy has been taught by Paul himself, and he's the leader of the church in Ephesus. But Timothy is being brought out of his comfort zone.

[7 : 15] He's having to deal with false teachers who are going about opposing his teaching and seeking to undermine the faith of those in his congregation.

In addition, if you read on to that, you'll see that Paul wants Timothy to come to Rome to help him whilst he's in prison. which, given Paul's situation and reputation, could be highly risky.

So he's being taken out of his comfort zone through suffering and hardship, certainly mentally and emotionally, possibly through abuse and ridicule, and possibly through physical persecution.

therefore, part of the reason that Paul is writing this letter is to encourage him in the face of this prospect. Now, Timothy is not your Bruce Willis.

He is not a bold, assertive person. He's rather a reticent, inward, shy person. he's very conscientious.

[8 : 33] And I think he probably gets very stressed. I think he's very stressed at this moment. In fact, I wouldn't be surprised if he's got an IBS. You know what one of those is? An irritable bowel syndrome. I wouldn't be surprised if that reference of Paul to taking wine in 1 Timothy 5 for his stomach ailments is because he's so knotted up dealing with these issues, and yet he hasn't got that personality that enables him to, you know, really go in and get it sorted out.

So, and that's very interesting, I think, because it shows us that the Bible deals with us as individuals. We see Peter, the impetuous person, fiery.

There's Paul, the intellectual, assertive. There's Timothy, reticent, shy, timid. But, Timothy has to be taken out of his comfort zone, and we're going to see why that has to happen, how to deal with it, and the, what God gives to enable him to do so.

Now, how about ourselves at Grace Church? Are we like Timothy? Have we got to the point where we're in a rather cozy situation? Or maybe, are we a bit diffident at work or at school about sharing our faith, about putting our head above the parapet, about perhaps knowing some of our views on matters?

Well, Paul has something to say to us here as well. But maybe you're here today and you're not a Christian. Well, here is an opportunity, I think, this morning to hear about what it really means to be a Christian.

[10 : 20] Often, it's said that come to Jesus and he will solve all your problems. Well, that couldn't be further from the truth. For Timothy, being a Christian meant that his life is going to be hardship and suffering.

In fact, hardship and suffering precisely because he is a Christian. And in fact, as Paul later goes on to show this really is a general principle of the Christian life.

So, in this passage, Paul is going to encourage Timothy to encourage him that serving the risen Lord Jesus Christ means enduring hardship and suffering.

But there is the prospect of enjoying eternal glory with Jesus' Saviour. and that this is in fact a well-trod path. And if you want to take notes, then on the back of the service sheet there is an opportunity to see some of the points that I'm making and also if you want to add some notes in to do so.

So, let's look at this first point. Endure hardship in the service of Jesus our Saviour. Timothy is going to face suffering.

[11 : 47] There are false teachers who are quarrelling on his teaching on the Gospel and we'll hear more about that next week. And it's causing him some suffering and it seems it's going to increase. There are risks as we've already said that are likely to take place when Timothy comes to visit Paul in Rome.

It's a hostile world climate that he's living in. And therefore it's hardly surprising that Timothy might be worried, frightened, apprehensive.

And therefore Paul says straight out if we look in verse 3 share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

Notice Paul doesn't come along with tea and sympathy rather he issues and order. There was a great preacher, a Welsh preacher up in Westminster, Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones used to minister at Westminster Chapel and he had this great quote he said the Christian isn't in a hospital he's in a barracks and to be a minister of the Gospel as Timothy was and indeed to be a Christian as I trust we are means that we're not patients we're not on a hospital bed we're not on a hospital ward we're soldiers in Christ's army and we're out in the war zone.

Now we're to be honest extremely fortunate in this country that over the last you know 60 years we've lived under peace we haven't risked being shot as we walked out of our door or as we meet together on a Sunday but as I'm sure we're all aware the political climate is changing evangelical Christians are progressively becoming a disliked even hated minority and we've seen this particularly I think with all the discussion in the newspaper and in the media in general over the debate that's going on with the Lambeth Conference with what human sexuality is and how it should be lived and how it relates to leadership in the church and the view that we take that homosexuality is wrong is out of kilter with what the world wants to say about it certainly in this country and we're seeing a rise of militant atheism people like

[14 : 26] Richard Dawkins who feel they're on the up they've got the edge now and if you're into Radio 4 commentary just listen to some of the rants that Marcus Brigstot likes to make about Christianity it's a different world and so the world that Timothy is in is maybe not so far away from the world that we're in or progressively will be so where's the encouragement well the encouragement is that first of all that suffering is at the heart of the Christian gospel let's have a look at verse 8 where Paul says remember Jesus Christ risen from the dead the offspring of David remember Jesus Christ risen from the dead the offspring of David the offspring of David Jesus Christ is that promised king the one that would succeed

David the one that would be the hope of all Israel the one that would be the great deliverer but how was that deliverance to be affected well it was through suffering and in particular through death death on a cross a vile death and horrendous death and in fact if we look at the life of the Lord Jesus Christ as we see it in the gospels Jesus was never in his comfort zone the Lord of heaven has come to earth he's living amongst sinners he's progressively being hated by the very people he's come to save and it said he said to someone when they were talking about following him he said look foxes have holes birds of the air have their nests but the son of man has nowhere to lay his head

Jesus became the focal point of a nasty and vicious campaign by the religious leaders of that day to discredit him to persecute him and ultimately to kill him so Timothy look to Jesus Christ you're going to go through suffering but look at he has suffered you're not on your own there's one who has walked this way before you but this path of suffering is also exemplified by the apostle Paul probably the greatest Christian preacher that's lived and church planter and yet his life when he became from virtually the moment he became a Christian was marked by suffering and as he writes this letter he's still suffering as he gets to the end of his life and yet he says remember verse 8 again remember

Jesus Christ risen from the dead the offspring of David as preached in my gospel for which I am suffering bound with chains as a criminal why is he suffering because he's still preaching the gospel and people still don't like it and if you want to know just how much people didn't like it then read 2 Corinthians 11 and listen to that list of beatings stonings imprisonments shipwrecks and on and on he go his body must have looked black and blue by the end of his life because of all of the all that he had to suffer and face however although Paul is bound does not mean the word of God is bound verse 8 again remember Jesus Christ risen from the dead the offspring of David as preached in my gospel for which I am suffering bound with chains as a criminal but the word of God is not bound rather it's through Paul's suffering that the word of God the gospel the good news of being saved from your sins in Jesus Christ is being furthered of course that's a great reminder that the gospel never relies on one person Paul has been a great stalwart to the Christian faith but Paul is now in prison he's facing death but the word that he received from Jesus Christ is not bound for example if we look in verse 2 he's passed it on to Timothy and now Timothy of course Timothy is not expendable Timothy passes it on to faithful men and those in turn will teach others the gospel goes out this is the true apostolic succession this is how God's kingdom is built and so we never think that we're dispensable no one likes of course to suffer so what other encouragement is there for

[19:42] Timothy and for Paul and indeed for us to keep going when faced with persecution and suffering from the gospel and note I want to make a difference here this is different from the ordinary trials of life it was very helpful hearing Dave talking about Ecclesiastes and the fact that good things and bad things happen to people and I think often we have to be very careful you know we might get ill and we've got my cross to bear well I wouldn't see it that way and we'll as we let's work through this that Paul here isn't talking about the aches and pains of life Paul is talking about specifically suffering because you are a Christian because you stand for Jesus Christ and that's the challenge so why is it worth it why be stoned why be beaten why be in prison why be crucified well it's where the gospel leads to that's important that's what makes the difference can you turn with me then to

Romans 8 page 1137 and let's read verses 16 to 18 of Romans chapter 8 so it's Paul speaking Paul writing and he says the spirit the Holy Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God and if children then heirs heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ provided we suffer with him in order that we may be glorified with him and this is the verse I want you to focus on bearing in mind what we've said about Paul for I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us so Paul we've heard about your stonings your imprisonments your beatings that looks like a pretty heavy weight and Paul says no let's get the scales out let's put this in there in the balance and let's put glory eternal glory there's no contest it doesn't just tip the whole thing's rocked over the weight of eternal glory far exceeds anything and bear in mind none of us here has or certainly probably will have to endure what Paul suffered and yet when he accounts it there's no contest glory outweighs it all and let's go back to that verse let's go back to verse 8 again remember Jesus Christ risen from the dead the offspring of David

Jesus died and it was a horrendous death but that of course wasn't the end of the story far from it Paul says that Jesus rose from the dead of course where is he now well let's turn to the Apostles Creed that we frequently recite on Sunday morning here on the third day he rose again from the dead he ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty whence he shall come to judge the living and the dead and in fact we just sung it Jesus although he suffered is now reigning in glory with his father so the prospect of eternal glory is a powerful motivation it was for Jesus it was for Paul personally but also it is for us if we look at verse 10 Paul says I endure everything for the sake of the elect for the sake of God's people so that they might obtain the salvation in Christ Jesus with eternal glory what does it mean to be saved is it to come to Jesus and have all your problems solved no it's come to Jesus be prepared to endure hardship and suffering because of him but and it is a big but know that in the end your life here sorry know that at the end of your life here you have the prospect of eternal glory to enjoy and so

I think we can then use these three pictures these three metaphors that Paul gives in verses 4 to 4 to 8 regarding the the soldier the athlete and the farmer being a first century soldier was no easy life it was one of discomfort and suffering but the soldier would endure it in order to receive in a sense his reward in order to please his commanding officer it required dedication it required focus he

would not get entangled in civilian affairs and I don't want to go into a lot of detail on that but certainly we can say that it doesn't mean you don't retreat into a monastery but rather that if we're not being entangled in civilian affairs we're not seeking the praise of others we're seeking the praise of the one who enlisted us we don't seek the praise of men we seek the praise of Christ surely there's those words in

Matthew's gospel that echoes here with the talents the parable of the talents where at the end there's that well done good and faithful servant is that what we're working for well done good and faithful servant so let's be focused like soldiers pleasing our commanding officer but also we see this picture of the athlete we're going to hear a lot of pictures of athletes we'll see a lot of pictures of athletes over these next two weeks or so with the Olympic games being on the hardship the training the dedication is incredible and I'm sure we've already seen stories of that but of course according to the rules I was listening to a very interesting interview with a cyclist one of these people who competes in the Tour de France an American and saying the temptation to take drugs was incredible because so many other people were doing this this was a few years ago and you would put so much effort in and you'd still only come third but you've got to compete according to the rules we have to compete according to the commands

[27 : 05] Jesus had given us the rules Jesus had given us and that will be hard it will be difficult but in the end there is a crown not a laurel wreath not a gold medal but a crown of righteousness which is in heaven and finally there's a hard working farmer one who has to prepare the ground sow the seed cultivate weed bring in the harvest but all of that effort ultimately there is that reward so we see these three pictures suffering hardship but there's reward there's praise there's a crown and so let's think about these things as Paul says let's grant that the Lord will give us understanding as we apply those pictures this concept of being prepared to suffer in the light of the eternal glory that the Lord

Jesus Christ will give to us so how do we do this well first of all do we see the glory it's so easy for it to get marred and lost in all the busyness of life is the hope of heaven the hope of glory something that affects our thoughts our motives our actions well certainly it was for Jesus perhaps turn with me to the book of Hebrews on page 1212 let's see what motivated Jesus as he lived so Hebrews 12 verses 1 to 2 page 1212 remember we've had that great list of the heroes of faith in the old testament the men and women who stood who persevered who often were suffering and then we read therefore since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses let us also lay aside every weight and sin that clings so closely and let us run with endurance notice that endurance word there let us run with endurance the race that is set before us looking where to Jesus our commanding officer the founder and perfecter of our faith and what about what did

Jesus do well for the joy that was set before him he endured the cross despising the shame and of course is now seated at the right hand throne of God the path Timothy you have to take it's the same one Jesus took you endure the suffering with the hope of glory is that the way we get up tomorrow morning and face the challenges that we are now of course don't get me wrong I'm not preaching Christian masochism I don't want you to go out and look for suffering but rather the question is how do we react when suffering comes and do we shy away putting ourselves into a situation where suffering might arise where persecution might arise where difficulties might arrive I said before that Timothy is no extrovert he wasn't a Paul he was of a shy and quiet disposition maybe you're such a person you're wondering well I just find it so difficult well how are we going to how are we going to do how are we going to face up to this well let's look at verse one

Paul says Timothy verse one of chapter two you then my child be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus never underestimate the power of grace when we say the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit we're not mouthing words we're tapping into the resources that God has at his disposal to give to us to enable us to stand and endure persecution suffering whatever challenges face us it's interesting though of course that God gives it at just the right time and a nice illustration of this can be seen in the life of Corrie Ten Boom I don't know if any of you know about Corrie Ten Boom she was a survivor of she was a Dutch from a Dutch Christian family and she was a survivor of the Nazi concentration camps they were imprisoned because they hid Jews in their home they took an incredible risk to save and I think it was about 800 Jews were saved through her it's an amazing story if you want to read about it you can find it in the book called The Hiding Place she wrote in 1974 an account of when she was in Africa in a nation where a new government had come to power and she writes the first night I was

there some of the Christians were commanded to come to the police station to register when they arrived they were arrested and the same night they were executed the next day the same thing happened with other Christians the third day it was the same all the Christians in the district were being systematically murdered the fourth day I was to speak in a little church the people came but they were filled with fear and tension all during the service they were looking at each other and their eyes were asking will this one

[32 : 53] I am sitting beside be the next one to be killed or will I be the next one the room the room was hot and stuffy and swirled around the naked bulbs of the bare wooden benches and she says I told them a story of my childhood when I was a little girl I said I went to my father and said daddy I am afraid that I will never be strong enough to be a martyr for Jesus Christ her father said tell me when you take the train to Amsterdam when do I give you the money for the ticket three weeks before she replied no daddy you give me the money for the ticket just before we get on the train that's right my father said and so it is with God's strength our father in heaven knows when you will need the strength to be a martyr for Jesus and he will supply you all you need just in time my

African friends were nodding and smiling suddenly a spirit of joy descended upon that church and the people began singing in the sweet by and by we shall meet on that beautiful shore they're looking to heaven she then writes later that week half the congregation of that church was executed I heard later that the other half was killed some months ago we may have to endure suffering but there is grace the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ to enable us to face it and there is glory to go to so let us encourage that Paul ends with this passage with a quote which is probably from an early Christian hymn and it reiterates the points he's been making and also emphasizes the serious nature so we read in verses 11 to 13 if we have died with him we will also live with him if we endure we will also reign with him if we deny him he will also deny us if we are faithless he remains faithful for he cannot deny himself the first two lines are an encouragement but the second two lines provides us with a very stark warning and

I would just really read from Matthew 10 the words of Jesus as a commentary on those verses so everyone who acknowledges me before men I will also acknowledge before my father who is in heaven but whoever denies me before men I also will deny before my father in heaven do not think that I have come to bring peace on the earth I have not come to bring peace but a sword for I have come to set a man against his father a daughter against her mother a daughter in law against her mother in law and a person's enemies will be those of his own household whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me and whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me whoever finds his life will lose it and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it have we died to

Christ not to our sins but to self that he is the one we follow even if it puts us in very difficult situations are we tempted to deny him think of all those opportunities where something comes up we could say something we don't it's interesting we had that in the confession for living as if we were ashamed to belong to your son father forgive us save us and help us so when you're facing that crunch decision remember the grace of God and that you're in Christ's army and therefore look to please the captain of your salvation above all else and remember that being taken out of your comfort zone is all part of God's purpose for preparing you and bringing you to glory let us pray our gracious

God and our father in heaven Lord we have been challenged by the life of your son by the life of the apostle Paul by your word by the reminder that being a Christian is not easy being a Christian can lead to suffering hardship persecution death father we are thankful to you that we have not had to face those extreme situations but lord how much worse it is therefore that in the lesser situations we we often fail you please forgive us and grant that we might take courage from the words that Paul has given to Timothy that they might be our own that we might remember Jesus Christ risen from the dead the gospel for whom I am suffering amen to the mercy the the ■■■■ father into herará como aan erne